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AUTHOR Moriarty, Sheila; Hoffmann, Rita
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ABSTRACT

This report was prepared as a result of Minnesota Governor Rudy Perpich's 1984 request that the Governor's Council on Families and Children review the status of Minnesota's families and children, report its findings, and determine the concerns of other interested people in the state. The report presents highlights and records comments from four public meetings and from a survey of people who had read an executive summary prepared earlier by the council. The information is arranged in the form of answers to the following questions: (1) What is the appropriate role of state government in supporting families and children? (2) What methods might be used to ensure that all children receive adequate health care? (3) What should be the roles of government, business, and the voluntary sector in helping families to secure adequate child care? (4) Who should provide education for parenting--and are schools responsible? and (5) How can government exercise a protective function for children in dysfunctional families and still respect the rights of all persons involved? The summaries and comments are followed by three appendixes: (1) Governor Perpich's executive order, which established the Council on Families and Children; (2) the text of the council's 1984 executive summary on the status of Minnesota's families and children; and (3) information on the survey, "We Need To Know," which elicited many of the comments in the body of the report. (SKC)

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Dilemmas

FAMILIES AND CHILDREN

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DIFFERENT VOICES:
RESPONSES FROM MINNESOTA'S MANY FAMILIES

A report to Governor Rudy Perpich submitted by
the Governor's Council on Families and Children

Department of Human Services
400 Centennial Office Building
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Prepared by:
Sheila Moriarty, Executive Director
Rita Hoffmann, Consultant

AUGUST 1985

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INTRODUCTION

Governor Perpich met with members of the newly formed Governor's Council on Families and Children in July, 1984. At that time, he asked them to review the status of Minnesota's families and children, and to report the group's findings and recommendations to him. He also asked that the Council listen to the current concerns of other Minnesotans who have a particular interest in the state's families and children.

Accordingly, in December, 1984, the Council issued a report entitled MINNESOTA FAMILIES AND CHILDREN. It contained not only new demographic information about the changing needs and roles of Minnesota's families, but also a series of recommendations on health care, income and employment support, child care, education, and the legal system.

Three months after its publication, the Council circulated an informal survey among those persons who had received the report.* At the same time, the Council held the first of four public meetings to hear reactions to their work to date, and to listen to current concerns. The meetings were held in Goodhue, Mille Lacs, Dakota, and Hennepin counties. In choosing these sites, the Council hoped to hear rural, suburban, and urban reactions to the issues under discussion. Invitations were sent to community leaders--bankers, business people, lawyers, clergy, educators, health care professionals, and social service providers. Also, local newspapers published notices of times and dates of the meetings and urged the public to attend.

Between 30 and 50 people attended each of the meetings, and where feasible, smaller groups were formed to facilitate discussion. Many of the participants were people who provide direct services to families and children. Thus, many of the reactions reported here reflect opinions of those in the "helping professions."

During the six months of listening, five themes emerged clearly as being of major concern to participants in the discussions. They are listed below as five questions:

1. What is the appropriate role of state government in supporting the state's families and children, and how can it promote economic self-sufficiency for those families who must now depend upon public assistance?

2. What methods might be used to assure that all children receive adequate health care?

3. What should be the roles of government, of business, of the voluntary sector, in helping families to secure adequate child care?

4. Who should provide education for parenting, and what is the responsibility of the schools in this relatively new area?

5. How can government exercise a protective function for children in dysfunctional families and still respect the rights of all persons involved?

This report is not an attempt to answer the preceding questions. Rather, it hopes to capture some of the highlights of the four meetings, to record some of the comments received with the survey sheets, and to present a synthesis of the information gathered. The opinions selected for quotation are those which expressed most concisely both majority and minority opinions of the issue under discussion.

The five chapters in this report address the five questions listed previously under these headings:

Government's Role	page 3
Health Care	page 7
Child Care	page 12
The Schools	page 17
The Dysfunctioning Family	page 20

Members of the Council wish to thank the many participants--both quoted and unquoted--whose opinions are the subject matter of this report. The Council also wishes to thank Governor Perpich for initiating this dialogue and hopes that the report will serve both him and others as a platform for discussing important policy questions affecting families and children.

* See Appendix for:
Governor's Executive Order establishing the Council
Summary of MINNESOTA FAMILIES AND CHILDREN
Details of survey headed "We Need to Know"

GOVERNMENT'S ROLE

I.

When tornadoes roared through Ohio and Pennsylvania in May, 1985, the governors of both states declared the affected communities to be disaster areas and requested federal help. But one Amish community in Atlantic, Pennsylvania, which had suffered the loss of an elderly member, a school, ten barns and homes, turned for help to its brethren in other Amish communities which had not been touched by the tornadoes. An Amish bishop, who is also a carpenter and a mason, explained the spiritual covenant between members of the sect: "When something like this happens, we call other congregations and all get together. Everybody brings eats and we all go to work." One non-Amish neighbor, whose house had been destroyed, predicted that the Amish structures would be entirely rebuilt by the end of the summer, adding that he, himself, had no insurance on his house and did not know as yet what he was going to do.

The picture of neighbor-helping-neighbor and family members working together for the common good is a favorite image of what we would like American family and community life to look like. But, except in some isolated instances, such as the story above, families who can function independently of other institutions are relatively rare.

The world in which today's families operate is vastly different from an earlier model in which families could function largely as self-sufficient units. Powerful social, demographic and technological forces have been at work reshaping many of the structures as well as the functions of the American family. For example: In Minnesota today, a majority of husband and wife families have both partners in the work force. Substantial numbers of these families have children under school age. The rate of increase in the number of single parent households has grown just as dramatically as it has nationwide. A majority of such households are headed by women, and the largest percentage of poor children live in these households. Whereas, once Minnesota enjoyed a fairly large middle class whose norms often set standards for what the "good life" could be, today, income disparities among families are widening. Too often, this "good life" remains financially out of reach, resulting in stress and a sense of failure for those families who cannot afford its components.

Increasingly, over the years, government has stepped in to help fill the gaps. Examples of such government help: immunization and hot lunch programs, unemployment and workers' compensation insurance, loans and grants for higher education, Medicaid and Medicare, and a variety of Social Security benefits. These are but a few examples of the many ways in which governments and families interact, of the ongoing interdependence between the two.

No one who came to the public meetings denied that government can and does influence the lives of families and children. The question that was debated: How direct should this involvement be?

Some thought that government should act only as a catalyst in its efforts to help.

> "Consider increasing the exemption given to taxpayers with dependents. This should be indexed with the general rate of inflation. This would give a clear message that the State of Minnesota 'promotes' families. Beyond tax incentives such as the above, I think that the state should not interfere with the functioning of families."
>
> - Clinical Social Worker-

> "We need to strengthen the economic base of communities so that they are able to offer programs and services in a more coordinated manner. This is the way we can best help families."
>
> -Job Developer-

However, many felt that government should be more active in its efforts to help.

> "Instead of more programs for out-of-home child care, the state should provide parents with incentives to stay home with their own pre-school children. The state could actually influence parents to stay home with children in their early years by offering tax programs and credits that are substantial."
>
> - An Attorney "Guardian Ad Litem"-

One of the persistent themes that surfaced in the meetings was the complaint that the stress of dealing with government in its many facets was the greatest

stress of all for families. Particularly for families who are undergoing difficulties, the frequent changing of rules and regulations, the constant shifting of programs, can make government seem more like an adversary than a partner.

> "Try to get some of the programs and plans suggested out of the 'political football' status. The well-being of families with children needs to be viewed and dealt with consistently and on a continuum. Programs and policies need to build on the past and look toward the future. As long as many legislators view their legislative terms as standing alone, families and children will continue to feel that they are on a roller coaster. One legislature picks them up, and just as they are making progress, another legislature pulls the rug from under them. It's expensive economically and in terms of human costs."
>
> - Department of Education Representative-

II.

Perhaps there is no area of family life in which the government's presence is felt more strongly than in public assistance programs--most visibly, single parents receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). The problem seems to be that the current system presents these recipients with a dilemma: If they take a job, they can lose both child care and health care subsidies, neither of which is likely to be replaced with similar benefits from the jobs usually available to them. If they remain totally dependent on the welfare system, they condemn both themselves and their families to poverty. There used to be a middle-ground available to these recipients, but with recent revisions in federal and state law, that ground seems to be eroding.

> "I have been working and going to school and bringing up two children. I have had to fight one battle after another over all the rules about credit hours and courses of study. . . Now they tell me I'll have to pay part of the cost myself if I want to work 20 hours a week this summer. . .I can't find help in this system we have."
>
> - AFDC Parent-

"It took me two months to get food stamps after my husband hadn't had work for one year. And when he went back to work, and I told them I didn't need them anymore, that they should give them to someone who did, they told me I should still stay on the program! Does that make any sense?"

- AFDC Parent-

"If you're on AFDC, the more you try to better yourself, the harder it gets. Especially with child care. If you go to work, you're probably not going to earn enough to make up for what you'll probably have to pay for child care. If you don't go to work, you can stay at home with your kids, but neither you nor the kids can live a half-way decent life on an AFDC grant alone."

- AFDC Parent-

Those difficulties were corroborated by many of the professionals involved in public assistance programs.

"I work with many single mothers, and it is really frustrating for them because they want to work. But if they do get a job, then they lose their AFDC grant, or get a big cut. If they stay home, they can get more money than if they worked."

- Parent Educator-

But there were some, in both the public and the private sectors, who showed little sympathy for this dilemma.

"If people did not get divorced, they would not need welfare. It's their own fault if their children suffer. They should think about this before they go ahead and get divorced."

-Banker-

"We pay more now for welfare benefits than we do for education. Education, not welfare expenditures, should be our state's number one priority. Education is where our future lies."

- Legislator-

However, all voices--AFDC recipients, social workers, business people and legislators--seemed to agree on one needed change: That the present disincentives to work must be removed from the AFDC program.

HEALTH CARE

> "I would like to say to the policy makers: Where do you think tomorrow's work force, customers, clients are going to come from if you don't take care of children today? What will they be like? There are statistics which show that every dollar spent on pre-school intervention and other preventive programs saves $8 down the road. In my opinion, that $8 may become $12, or $20, or $50 in the future."
>
> -Head Start Program Coordinator-

No voice was raised at any of the public meetings objecting to the premise that all children have a right to good health care, that this is a right, not a privilege. Rather, discussion centered on what constitutes good health care for children and how it can be paid for, given the radical changes occurring in delivery of services and its ever rising costs.

> "Many low income families fall between the cracks in the health care system. Their incomes may be too high to qualify for government help, but too low to pay for health care on their own. The result, especially for children, can be alarming."
>
> -Pediatrician-

> "Too often, health care is the first item to be cut out of a meager family budget. You can take a chance on not getting sick but you can't take a chance on not eating."
>
> -Public Health Nurse-

> "More and more hospitals are having to cover the medical costs of those who have no insurance and no money to pay."
>
> -Hospital Administrator-

The economic and employment status of families in Minnesota, to a large measure, determines their health status. (Almost one quarter of all Minnesotans are marginally employed and do not have health insurance.) Children in families who are poor suffer disproportionately from illnesses and poor health. According to a 1983 study by Maine's Department of Human Services, the death rate for poor children from 8 days to 17 years old is three times that of other children. Children's

Defense Fund (Washington D.C.) estimates that over a five-year period, more children die from poverty than the total number of American battle deaths in the Vietnam War.

It was generally agreed that programs which emphasize prevention (e.g., early and periodic screening, prenatal care services) are more effective, both in terms of providing good health care for children of poor families and for cutting costs of that care. However, agreement was not general on who should pay for those programs.

> "People should take more responsibility for their own health care. Government's responsibility should stop with the awarding of block grants to be used by counties for programs deemed necessary for that particular county."
>
> -Rural Banker-

> "The trend to combine services into block grants is very wrong...The federal food stamp program is the only program providing a benefit floor for all poor families and children in the nation. Think what would happen if that program were administered as block grants!"
>
> -Director Head Start Health Services-

Arguments in favor of block grants stressed that local goverments are in the best position to assess local needs and to administer the funds accordingly. Those opposed to block grants believe that certain groups should have monies earmarked for them by the state, citing the Women, Infants and Children (WIC, a supplemental food stamp program) as an example of effective targeting of funds. The need for help remains the same, they said, whether the person lives in International Falls, or Austin, Minnesota.

When the topic of what constitutes <u>good</u> health care was addressed, again a chorus of different voices was heard. The recurrent theme in these discussions was expressed well by Harvey Fineberg, Dean of the Harvard School of Public Health, writing in <u>Technology Review</u>: "The way we pose questions about medical expenditures is all-important. If asked, 'What is it worth paying to save a life?', we are tempted to respond, 'Whatever it takes.' A more pertinent question is, 'Where will additional dollars produce the greatest health beneits?'"

"We've become enamored of technology today. We spend millions in an effort to defeat death, while allowing our infant mortality rate to remain one of the highest in the Western world."

-Congressional Staff Member-

"We use a highly professional and expensive health care system to handle Third World health problems. It's time we changed our focus: paraprofessionals for routine problems and preventive medicine, the professionals as consultants."

-City Health Department Director-

"The importance of the school nurse is being overlooked today. They well understand that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. They're in a good position to identify children in need, to spot troubles at their start, to oversee nutrition programs, perhaps to provide the education children are going to need to become knowledgeable consumers of health care. Yet school nurses are one of the first to be cut from any school board's budget."

-Former School Nurse-

The necessity for individuals to become "knowledgeable consumers of health care" was mentioned frequently. One concerned participant, declaring that she doesn't really understand how Health Maintenance Organizations (HMOs) operate, had this to say:

"The whole medical thing is becoming too complicated and confusing for the average person to understand. All the different programs, services, what is offered and what isn't, comparisons of cost...How do you go about making the right choice?"

In one discussion, the advantages and problems of HMOs were discussed in some detail. Those who favored their use pointed out that HMOs provide a cornerstone for preventive medicine, that they have dramatically lowered the cost of health care for their member families. Recently, the state considered an initiative that would

require all Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) recipients to enroll in a prepaid health care plan or an HMO. Regarding that initiative, Francis Giberson, Deputy Commissioner of Minnesota's Department of Human Services, wrote:

> "More than 40 percent of the metropolitan area's insured population already belongs to prepaid health care plans...The public acceptance of HMOs, the willingness of the prepaid health plans to accept publicly funded clients, and their cost containment potential all point to an efficient and effective strategy for controlling the rising costs of the Medicaid program."

But there were other voices who worried about the possible lack of continuity in medical personnel and its effect on patients.

> "HMOs aren't for everyone. You have to be a somewhat sophisticated health-care consumer to be able to take advantage of what they offer. You have to know what questions to ask, and what to insist on. A lack of continuity in the care provided can be upsetting for those who do not or cannot take responsibility for their own health. And people with the Marcus Welby Syndrome get along much better, of course, with a long-standing relationship with one physician."
>
> - Employee Assistance Program Director-

But no matter what aspect of health care was under discussion, the problem of cost containment eventually became the central issue.

When asked what might be done to help families with the problems posed by new directions and rising costs in health care, some suggestions offered by participants in the public meetings were:

- When considering cost containment, be sure to factor in long range costs, as well as short-term savings. Preventive programs seem to be more cost-effective than those which focus on treatment alone.

- The state might provide funds for a sliding-fee scale for health-care costs -- an apparent need for the many Minnesotans who do not qualify for Medicaid but cannot afford to pay for health insurance out of their own pockets.

- Since differing populations have differing health-care needs, make available to all Minnesotans clear information about various health care resources, and consider carefully whether all Medicaid recipients will be well served by HMOs.

- Promote statewide consistency among the 87 counties for health-care services.

- Some new ways for leveraging health-care dollars might be: additional funds for school nurse positions, the use of professionals as consultants only, increased use of paraprofessionals and other appropriate personnel within a community.

CHILD CARE

For most families in the past, child care was not a problem, since most mothers of young children did not work outside the home. But now, for many women, both in single-parent and in married-couple families, the choice of staying at home with their children is no longer an option. Standard-of-living expectations are higher than they were in the past, and when combined with the ever-rising costs of such essentials as housing and health care, it is not surprising to hear demographers predict that by the end of this century, the number of women in the work force will equal that of men. Since the majority of these women are and will be in their child-bearing years, a critical question becomes, Who will care for their children?

> "I stayed out of the work force for quite a few years to take care of my two children. But even with a third one on the way, we can't afford for me to stay home. After awhile, you get tired of never making it financially, of looking at patches on the couch, and of knowing that you can't afford even a Friday night out at McDonalds."
>
> - A Homemaker-

At all four public meetings, the area of child care called forth the most discussion. Agreement was general on only two propositions:

- The need for "other than mother" child care is a fact of life today.
- Since parents are ultimately responsible for the care and nurturance of their children, the choice of child care arrangements should be left in their hands.

Questions which called forth considerable discussion were:

- What do we mean by "child care"?
- Why does child care require such a large portion of a family's budget?
- How do we provide good standards?
- What is meant by "quality child care"?
- How can government become involved in ways that support families?

An exchange between a child care provider and a working mother epitomizes the "baby-sitting" discussions.

> "Good child care is much more than just baby-sitting. Lots of people want to pay baby-sitting rates and provide what they call 'quality time' themselves. In my opinion, all time should be quality time when you're talking about little children. But, in too many cases, it isn't. And won't be, until parents take a different attitude towards the ten hours or so a day most of them spend away from their children."
>
> -Child Care Provider-
>
> "I know that's right, and it's why I'm willing to pay nearly half of what I earn for child care. I used to believe that I could supply so-called quality time, but it's not always possible at the end of a long hard day at work. The same goes for attending parent conferences and so on. Yet I can't quit work. We need the money."
>
> -Working Mother-

But many parents are unable or unwilling to pay for more than custodial care. They argue that there's little point in working outside the home if most of the needed extra money must go for child care. This argument was not confined to low-income parents. Indeed, a study conducted at Portland State University in Oregon, entitled "Hard to Find and Difficult to Manage," revealed it was a common attitude among the women employees surveyed who had family incomes of $30,000 or above.

This finding came as no surprise to those discussants involved in early childhood education.

> "Most people don't understand that the first five years of a child's life are the most important ones in the educational process, nor do they understand the price we are likely to pay for treating these crucial years so casually. When I say 'most people,' I'm not just talking about parents. I also refer to the makers of public policy, the allocators of funds. Contrary to popular belief, America is not at all child-centered."
>
> - Director, Child Care Center-

Child care is a very labor-intensive field. Even simple baby-sitting requires a responsible person to keep a child fed, clean and out of harm's way. To go beyond those basic services, to provide a child with the activities and attention needed during these crucial years, requires personnel experienced in the ways and needs of young children, adequate physical space, and supplies and equipment appropriate to the child's age. In spite of the fact that workers in this field are notoriously underpaid, (from $3.30/hr. for an aide to $5.50/hr. for a teacher with a college degree), child care remains a major item in a family budget (up to $78/wk for a pre-school child).

Minnesota has set high standards for both its licensed homes and licensed centers, thus assuring parents of a safe environment and adequate nutrition and supervision for their children. But the cost of compliance with these regulations can be high, and some discussants blamed the regulations for discouraging providers from entering or remaining in the field.

> "I'd like the state to know that I have standards for child care that I consider more important than their licensing standards. Last week, my day-care provider called to say she was quitting, that she couldn't afford to meet all the new licensing standards set by the state, that it just wasn't worth her time anymore. Well, I've been more than satisfied with her services, and I'm devastated. Who cares whether a <u>place</u> meets licensing standards? What I care about is the <u>person</u> taking care of my child."
>
> - Elementary School Teacher-

Both parents and professionals seemed to agree that trust in the provider was all important. But who to trust, and why, was another matter. Some preferred informal arrangements; others -- licensed homes; still others --licensed centers, both for-profit and non-profit. Preferred care for infants and toddlers was usually a licensed home, where personal qualities of the provider become the deciding factor. For pre-schoolers, a center was more often preferred. Location and cost were also seen as important factors in making a choice. Therefore, it was agreed that child care arrangements should be left in the hands of parents, who are best able to evaluate their individual circumstances, needs, and preferences.

How to recognize a center which offers quality child care was discussed at some length by various professionals.

> "For very low-income families, health care, nutrition and social services may be of vital importance to a center's program, whereas a middle-income family would not regard those things as what they mean by quality child care."
>
> - Head Start Teacher-

> "Many parents don't really know what quality child care is. They have a tendency to choose centers based on aesthetics -- a nice building, nice equipment, good meals. They ought to pay more attention to the program and the teachers."
>
> - Child Care Provider-

> "The size of the group should be appropriate to the age. The providers should have some training or experience in working with children -- but not necessarily some kind of degree. The center should offer child-directed activities and a well planned curriculum. But most of all -- it should encourage, even insist on parent involvement in the program."
>
> - Child Care Provider-

But a single parent, even as she recognized the importance to her children of keeping in close touch with their environment during the time she could not be with them, said:

> "I'd love to be involved. But how? Right now I'm working two jobs to support my kids. That doesn't leave much time to become involved."

Child care is no longer just a "women's issue" or a problem for "welfare mothers." Certainly it is not a problem for those families who are able to care for their children in their own homes or who can afford to purchase good child care in the community. But for many families, especially for those in the middle-income range who do not qualify for subsidized help, it is a major problem.

Since child care has become an area of concern for a great many Minnesota families, discussants turned to the question: What might be some ways in which the state could alleviate the problem?

- Overwhelming support was voiced for the state's sliding-fee program, which helps low-income parents pay for child care.
- Government could provide incentives to businesses to help employees with child care needs.
- Government might serve as a prod to the establishment of more infant care and sick-child care facilities.
- School facilities should be made available for "latchkey" and other kinds of child care programs.

But implicit or explicit in every suggestion was the need to maintain a clearly defined difference between government <u>support</u> and government <u>control</u>. As one parent put it:

> "There are things to be said both for and against making child care part of the public education system. I guess I would live in fear of government eventually becoming the only provider. And I still want the opportunity to make my own choices."

THE SCHOOLS

A constant theme voiced by participants in the public meetings was the necessity of teaching people -- both parents and children -- how to be more effective in their family roles. Although "latchkey" programs were mentioned as one additional but very important responsibility the schools might undertake, little mention was made of curriculum revision, teacher training, competency testing, etc. The emphasis in all the discussions was on parent involvement in the education of their children, both at school and at home.

> "The most significant problem facing our state is the deterioration of Mother-and-Dad families. As a teacher, every day I am reminded of how families have changed. And not for the better...Helping and teaching families and children to communicate with each other and care for each other at all stages of life: that is our most important task."
>
> -Secondary School Teacher-

> "Too many parents seem quite willing to deliver their children to us at age 6 and expect to receive a finished product 12 years later without involvement on their parts."
>
> -Elementary School Teacher-

Those voices would seem to be in agreement with the comments of Robert C. Maynard who says: "Any educational reform that overlooks the importance of recruiting the parent as ally is bound to fail." He gave the Head Start Program as an example of money well spent, maintaining that until the importance of early childhood education is realized by all segments of society, secondary schools will continue to graduate functional illiterates.

One participant observed:

> "The Early Childhood and Family Education Program was designed primarily to teach people how to be parents, the need for which is a fairly recent development. But how do you get the right parents to these meetings? Those who need the program most seem to stay away."
>
> -Community Education Director-

It seems as if the help that families once looked for from their neighborhood, church or local community has shifted to the school. Some thought the schools could help families by introducing a variety of courses at all age levels on aspects of good parenting. A clergyman suggested that school districts might offer some time out of the school year when students could go out into the community for a "hands on" preview of parenthood.

Another area of concern to many of the discussants was discipline. Indeed, the Gallup polls indicated recently that nationwide, the public thinks student discipline is the Number One problem in the nation's schools. A statement, issued late last year by 27 educators from around the nation, urged the schools to put more emphasis on character development in its students. "One cause for the high level of youth disorders is the unsound policy of many schools to ignore character development and the formation of cooperative attitudes and skills in pupils," the report stated.

> "Discipline is what's missing in both families and schools. Lack of it is at the bottom of most of the problems we have with juveniles today."
>
> -Juvenile Court Worker-

However, several teachers contended that the schools had all they could do to perform the teaching function that belongs to them without taking on more responsibilities.

> "Don't ask the schools to take on any more duties and responsibilities! We are supposed to educate children, not raise them."
>
> -Teacher-

As noted in the Council's 1984 report: "Very few members of any group have no opinion on what is wrong with education today." This assertion held true for all the public meetings during 1985. At one end of the continuum were those who believe the schools should help parents raise their children. At the opposite end were those who insist that the school's obligation ceases with the teaching of academic subjects. However, all seemed to agree that parent involvement in the education of children is missing and is badly needed.

When discussants were asked how the schools might foster parent involvement in the education of children, a few suggestions were:

> "Support programs that get parents involved with their children's schools. Like 'latchkey' and the Early Childhood and Family Education programs. And then see that funds are included for time-consuming but necessary outreach efforts."
>
> -Elementary School Principal-

> "Parent contact takes an enormous amount of time out of an already over-crowded schedule. Some extra-curricular activities will have to be eliminated in favor of it. And results are unlikely to show immediately."
>
> -Junior High School Teacher-

> "Teachers seem to need more training in how to handle parent contacts, without threatening the parents or being threatened themselves. I've seen it both ways. This whole area seems to be neglected in teacher training."
>
> -Parent-

Educators have long realized the importance of the family's influence on the success or failure of the school's efforts. They have tried repeatedly, but with scant success, to address the problem: How to make parents realize that without their participation in the education of their children, that children are likely to remain uneducated. The roots of the problem, like the roots of crab grass, are pervasive, sending out long runners into the social landscape. But with widespread public awareness that "drop-out" parents too often spawn "drop-out" students, work may have begun on eradication of the roots.

Pogo's insight would seem to offer the best hope for eventual accomplishment of the task: "We have met the enemy, and he is us."

THE DYSFUNCTIONING FAMILY

> "The main problem today is that we have kids raising kids. We have a lot of immature adults who have no idea how to be parents."
>
> -Attorney and "Guardian ad Litem"-

For purposes of this report, a dysfunctioning family is one in which children have been abused, neglected, abandoned, or who have exhibited serious anti-social behavior. Causes of such conditions are many, e.g., alcoholism, poverty, mental illness and retardation. But the causes of these conditions, in turn, are not as easy to find. However, there was general agreement among participants in the public meetings on one important factor contributing to the seeming rise in dysfunctioning families: a lack of attention to parental responsibilities.

> "Child abuse and neglect, teen suicide and teen pregnancy--none of these problems is limited to any particular kind of family. I see the 'at-risk' family as one where the parent/parents know very little about good parenting."
>
> -Child Protection Worker-

> "Parents with children experiencing divorce are rudderless in a culture with a negative tradition that promotes each getting whatever he or she can...Children are people, not property. They have a need for and a right to, the love and care of both parents. Our current policies and developing traditions run counter to these basic principles."
>
> - Elementary School Teacher-

A special subject of concern was the growing number of unwed teenage mothers, most of whom elect to keep their babies, with little knowledge of how to care for them and little hope of being able to support them without long-term government assistance. The health risks of teenage pregnancy, to both mother and child, were seen as potential contributions to an increase in the number of dysfunctioning families in the future.

A retired educator remarked that some churches provide premarital counseling and an examination on parent competencies. Perhaps the state ought to provide a similar opportunity for everyone.

The frustration that many felt about this difficult problem was voiced in this extreme proposal.

> "It seems these days you need a license for everything you undertake. Maybe the state ought to require licensing for teenage parents."
>
> -School Guidance Counselor-

A more sympathetic understanding of this problem was stated by Gretchen Quie, wife of former Governor Al Quie. She also believes that government should play a role in trying to control the consequences of teenage pregnancy. Recently, her opinions on the subject appeared in the St. Paul Pioneer Press/Dispatch:

> "In the last 25 years, much information has been given, but the values and the teaching of responsible action have been lacking...Teen sexuality is first of all a family and a church problem. But millions of teens don't have a family they can count on and the church is irrelevant to most of them...When government has to pay for the consequences of misused sexuality, there is good reason for it to help people understand those consequences."

In its 1984 report to the Governor, the Council addressed legal issues involving the dysfunctioning family, and made what proved to be three controversial recommendations:

(1) "In any intervention, the state should choose the least intrusive means of intervening."

(2) "If the state feels it must intervene, the law should mandate documentation showing that less-intrusive alternatives have either been tried and have failed, or that they are not possible."

(3) "No child should be placed out-of-home without judicial review."

Many of the participants who attended these meetings had dealt with children from troubled families, and on the basis of their experiences, they were skeptical of these three recommendations, maintaining that more, rather than less, intervention on behalf of children is often needed.

> "Let the legal profession jump in, as it's now doing and right away you have an adversary situation rather than a problem solving one."
>
> -Domestic Relations Counselor-

> "It ought to be mandatory for every judge and attorney that has anything to do with children to complete a course in child development. Too many of them seem to think that children are just miniature adults. They aren't. They think and act quite differently."
>
> -Pediatric Nurse-

> "Trying less intrusive alternatives is often over-used at present, causing parents and children to go through an array of services instead of providing what is needed initially. All parties involved become frustrated in the process, and the children experience rejection and failure in the process."
>
> -Parent-

When asked how government might exercise a protective function for children and still respect the rights of families, many agreed with a child advocate who replied:

> "Social concerns about children seem lately to have become legal concerns. With some families, I have no qualms at all about intrusive intervention. A family's rights? What about a family's responsibilities as well?"

Minnesota ranks high in the nation for out-of-home placement of children. There are those who argue that such placements are used excessively, and too often are not only costly but also unnecessary, even counter-productive.

> "Some parents seem to welcome out-of-home placement to get out from under troublesome kids, especially where chemical dependency is involved. The system should be revised so this can't happen as easily as it does now."
>
> -Family Counselor-

How best to help children from dysfunctioning families remains a dilemma. Joseph Goldstein, Anna Freud and Albert J. Solnit, in their book, Beyond the Best Interests of the Child, call present child protective practices "too little or too much, too early or too late."

And according to an article in the Journal of the American Public Welfare Association, Spring, 1985: "As reporting increases, the number of children and parents being helped increases. So does the number of families being unnecessarily--and often harmfully--processed through the system."

A parole officer at one of the public meetings expressed the heart of the matter when he said:

> "One of the trade-offs that we make for living in this society is that we cannot intevene in the lives of citizens."

How to help families keep from becoming dysfunctioning families is another question. Some suggestions from participants:

- Address the mounting incidence of teenage pregnancy with something besides sex education.
- Make the various social service plans developed by Minnesota's 87 counties conform to more uniform standards.
- Disseminate information to the public, regarding sources for help with family problems.

APPENDIX

STATE OF MINNESOTA

EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT

EXECUTIVE ORDER NO. 84-11

PROVIDING FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL ON FAMILIES AND CHILDREN

I, RUDY PERPICH, GOVERNOR OF THE STATE OF MINNESOTA, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the applicable statutes, do hereby issue this Executive Order:

WHEREAS, families and children are truly our most precious social resource because they are responsible for perpetuating the basic goals and values which bind a society together; and

WHEREAS, Minnesota families reflect a richness of ethnic diversity and family styles which need to be supported and encouraged; and

WHEREAS, rapid and radical changes in society have brought new pressures and challenges to today's families, and especially to the children in these families; and

WHEREAS, public policy toward families and children is of the utmost importance because of the demonstrable effects on the family by the actions of major social institutions, including all levels of government; and

WHEREAS, public policy should be designed to combat harmful effects upon the family by all such activities, just as programs which actively service family needs should be devised and implemented.

NOW, THEREFORE, I order the creation of a Governor's Council on Families and Children. The Council shall consist of fifteen members representative of a broad spectrum of Minnesota citizens, with emphasis on people with a strong commitment to families as well as experience in working for the community good.

Pursuant to Minnesota Statutes, Section 4.035, this Order shall be effective fifteen (15) days after publication in the State Register and filing with the Secretary of State and shall remain in effect until rescinded by proper authority or it expires in accordance with Minnesota Statutes, Section 4.035, Subdivision 3.

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF I have set my hand this 25 day of July, 1984.

RUDY PERPICH
Governor

Filed According to Law:

Joan Anderson Growe July 26, 1984
JOAN ANDERSON GROWE
Secretary of State

MINNESOTA FAMILIES AND CHILDREN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY, DECEMBER 1984

Children under six are one of the fastest growing groups in Minnesota. Presently, over forty percent of the state's 1,128,000 children are in this age group and their numbers will continue to grow through the end of this decade. The mothers of these children, and women in general, are joining the workforce in increasing numbers. In fact, by the end of the century the numbers of women who are working will almost equal the numbers of men.

Family roles in Minnesota are changing. The "traditional" family of four, with the husband working outside the home and the wife caring for the children and household, represents only a small percent of Minnesota families. The reality is that 61 percent of married-couple households in Minnesota have two earners. Such families benefit economically, and the income gap between them and families with only a single earner is widening. Especially vulnerable are single-parent families. Over one-half of all Minnesota's single-parent families are at or below the poverty level.

A dramatic shift in family composition has been seen in the increase of households headed by women. They have increased significantly since 1970 and are projected to grow even more dramatically during the present decade. In 1980, one of every ten Minnesota children lived in female-headed households. A disproportionate number of these families are of minority groups. Despite the fact that three-fourths of these women are in the labor force, their incomes are low.

A 1978 Task Force on Families issued reports on employment, health care, education, and youth in the juvenile justice system. The current council has reviewed these earlier reports and concludes:

+ Unemployment continues to be a problem for many families in both industrial and agricultural regions of the state. The recession and shifts in the state's economy have left many families without jobs, income, or assets. Getting these Minnesotans back to work is a matter of highest priority.

+ Child care has become a necessity for families with parents working outside the home. The roles of government, business, and families need to be clearly defined. The choice of child care arrangements should remain in the hands of parents and the range of available alternatives must be expanded across Minnesota.

+ Minnesota's health care system is very different than it was in 1978. Cost containment initiatives, coupled with an expanding variety of health insurance options, require considerable education on the part of the consumer. An increasing number of families are without insurance or have inadequate insurance.

+ Trends toward community-based services are growing but the expansion of available monies has not kept pace.

+ Health care programs for children have proven beneficial. However, insufficient funding for these services, especially at the federal level, has reduced their effectiveness.

+ Educational reforms being discussed are disproportionately aimed at changing the system. More attention should be directed to productive relationships among students, their parents, teachers and administrators. Better cooperation between the home and the school is critical to educational reform.

+ Many so-called delinquent behaviors of young people may be symptoms of larger family problems. The juvenile justice system needs change. Interventions should focus on helping troubled families. Out-of-home placements should become a "last resort option."

The Governor's Council on Families and Children voted to adopt specific recommendations. Their list of priorities is offered to the Governor and to the people of Minnesota for action and discussion:

1. Adopt for use in all state agencies, family impact statements to use as guidelines in evaluating the effects of policies and programs on families and children. Such statements will be prepared by the Council by June 30, 1985.

2. Support Children's Trust Fund legislation to generate revenue to pay for family-based efforts to prevent the maltreatment of "children in need of protection."

3. Make child care a legislative priority. Target public resources to meet the child care needs of low-income families and use the state of Minnesota as a model employer to develop vouchers for child care as an employee benefit.

4. Make effective the early identification and intervention in providing health care for children, including pre-natal care so that problems can be identified and interventions to prevent or minimize developmental disabilities.

5. Support those educational programs that enhance parent/school partnerships, including, but not limited to, early childhood and family education programs.

6. Work for passage of the Catastrophic Health Insurance Bill. Deal with this as a health issue and not as a welfare issue.

7. Support legislative initiatives for community-based services that assist families to support disabled members at home.

WE NEED TO KNOW

The survey was distributed to approximately 500 individuals and organizations, at public meetings and by mail. Response rate was 20%.

Of the five categories listed, the area of most concern was evenly distributed among them, with Education receiving slightly more than 25% of the total, Juvenile Justice receiving slightly less than 20%, and Health Care, Child Care, Welfare, ranked between them in that order.

Of the 15 recommendations addressed in the survey, the top five were drawn from each of the five categories, suggesting the considerable overlap which exists among the categories. Rank order of the recommendations in each of the five categories is listed on the survey.

Among the topics for future consideration by the Council, Poverty ranked first with 35% of the total. Domestic Violence and Tax Policies tied, each with 20%, followed by Divorce/Separation, Housing, and Preservation of Ethnic Identities, in that order.

Respondents were also invited to answer an open-ended question: "What do you think the State of Minnesota could do to promote the well-being of families with children?"

WE NEED TO KNOW

Name_____

Address_____

_____

Occupation_____

Phone_____(home)_____(work)

Have you read the report, MINNESOTA FAMILIES AND CHILDREN? _____

Of the topics addressed in the report, check the one that is of most concern to you:

_____ Health Care
_____ Child Care
_____ Welfare
_____ Education
_____ Juvenile Justice

Under each category, check the recommendation made by the Council, which you believe is most in need of immediate attention:

HEALTH

__2__ The State should provide better access to the health care system by offering the public more education about the current array of health insurance plans; by monitoring the package of benefits offered by insurance plans; and by passing a Catastrophic Health Insurance bill.

__3__ Before persons are discharged from institutions, provisions for their adequate care should be made by the communities to which they are discharged.

__4__ New ways should be sought to subsidize maintenance nursing care in the home for low-income families.

__1__ Programs which focus on preventive care, (e.g. immunization, screening, family planning) should be actively supported and adequately funded.

CHILD CARE

__3__ A voucher system for child care should be implemented in the public sector and encouraged in the private sector

__1__ A sliding-fee scale for child care should be made available to low-income families by the State.

__2__ Child care licensing provisions should be examined, with a view to possible revision.

WELFARE

__2(tie)__ Job retraining should be provided for unemployed parents on AFDC, and program regulations should be changed to meet their needs.

WELFARE

__1__ The "disincentives to work", which are now part of the AFDC program, should be removed.

2(tie) The problems, both causing and caused by the growing number of unmarried teenage mothers, should be given careful consideration.

EDUCATION

__1__ Programs which actively involve parents in the education of their children, (e.g. Early Childhood and Family Education projects, Individual Education plans) should be supported and adequately funded.

__2__ Schools should expand the use of their facilities to accomodate "latchkey programs"-- after-school care for children of working parents.

JUVENILE JUSTICE

__1__ The State should establish a Children's Trust Fund, which could offer counties and private agencies the resources needed for family-based, prevention-oriented programs, to help problem families with children.

__2__ In any agency intervention involving families and children, the least intrusive means should be tried first, with documentation-of-need required for further intervention.

__3__ No child should be placed out-of-home without judicial review.

Of the topics not yet addressed by the Council, check the one you feel should be given priority consideration:

_____ Tax policies	_____ Housing
_____ Poverty	_____ Divorce/Separation
_____ Domestic violence	_____ Preservation of ethnic identities

Your additional comments on any topic or issue concerning families with children are welcome. Thank you for your help!

Return to:

Governor's Council on Families and Children
400 Centennial Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155